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Having trouble conceiving? Don't just assume it's the woman

BY ERIKA ROSE
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When a couple, after having tried pills, procedures and even surgery targeted at the woman, finally comes to see him after several years of trying to conceive a baby, **Dr. Joel Brasch** is saddened when he learns the couple never thought to get a sperm count early in the process.

"Nine out of 10 couples that walk in the door assume it's going to be a female problem" says **Brasch**, a reproductive endocrinologist and founder of **Advanced Reproductive Health Centers/Chicago IVF**, which has locations in Merrillville, Valparaiso and Munster as well as the Chicago suburbs.

Historically, **Brasch** says women have taken the blame for fertility issues and that from a social and psychological standpoint, society has a hard time grappling with male infertility.

The fact is, 40 percent of infertility is due to the female, 40 percent is the male's problem and 20 percent is a combination or simply unexplained, **Brasch** says.

Dr. Edward Marut, medical director of Fertility Centers of Illinois, talks about environmental factors that might negatively influence a man's fertility.

From tobacco and alcohol, prescription drugs, pollutants and body weight, all the way to tight boxers, drinking from plastic containers, preservatives in food and extreme temperatures, the environmental variables that have been potentially linked to male infertility are numerous. **Brasch** cautions that because of all the variables needing consideration, it is extraordinarily difficult to prove such links.

Still, he doesn't necessarily downplay the importance of paying attention to such factors and Marut says they aren't to be taken lightly. Especially smoking, which he



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Josef Blankstein, MD, FACOG works at **Chicago IVF, Advanced Reproductive Health Centers, LTD** in Munster. Blankstein specializes in infertility and reproductive endocrinology.

says is one of the more important factors to consider.

Contributing to men's overall unawareness and cavalier attitude, Marut says, is that unlike women, a man often doesn't have outward signs his testicular function may be failing. He emphasizes this is why adopting a healthier lifestyle in preparation for pregnancy is just as much the man's job as the woman's.

He says the proper attitude is simply to control what's feasible, such as avoiding tobacco, drugs, excessive alcohol and eating healthy. He says men taking prescription medication should ask their doctors whether the drug can affect reproduction.

Brasch adds that men should avoid steroids, which are most definitely testicu-

lar suppressants

Above all, **Brasch** says couples should not assume it's the female's problem, and get a sperm count early in the process. A sperm count is noninvasive and inexpensive.

Brasch says it's important to seek professional advice in a timely manner. He says a woman younger than 35 should definitely be pregnant within 12 months.

"The 35-plus age woman should really only try for six months" before seeking professional help, he says.

For those couples who do find themselves seeking the help of a fertility specialist, **Brasch** has some reassuring words. Thanks to giant leaps in lab technology, he says almost any couple with severe male infertility problems can experience success assuming the female is young enough in her reproductive years.

"It used to be, 20 years ago, we needed 5 million or 10 million sperm. Ten years ago, we needed a million sperm. Now, we need one. One healthy sperm cell, we can potentially cure a couple through in-vitro fertilization."

FYI: fcionline.com or chicago-ivf.com